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NEWSLETTER

Interview with Diane Brown,
AD of Ruby Slippers Theatre

Conducted by Mairy Beam,
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Diane is a multi award-winning director and actor, and she is the Artistic Director of Ruby Slippers Theatre. She is the 2017 recipient of the prestigious Bra D'Or Award from Playwrights Guild of Canada and a 2018 Nominee for the YWCA Women of Distinction Awards in recognition of her years championing works by women and furthering the voices of female-identifying artists in theatre. Her company's vision is to create a world where diversity/gender parity is celebrated through a deeper understanding of each other. Selected directing highlights: *Down Dangerous Passes Road*, *The Cat Who Ate Her Husband*, *Trout Stanley*, *Life Savers*, *The Leisure Society*, *After Me*, *I Lost My Husband*, *You Will Remember Me*, *Les Belles-soeurs*, and *Marine Life*. Selected acting credits: *Happy Place*, *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson*, *Communion*, *A Beautiful View*, and *Sled*. Diane heads Theatre Cares Vancouver, raising funds and awareness for people living with HIV/Aids, she sits on the Theatre Advisory Committee for Langara College, she is Chair of the Board for UCV, and she is a member of the Board of Directors for Vancouver Civic Theatres. Diane has a BFA from Simon Fraser University and an MFA in Directing from the University of BC.

GENERAL:

What is the mandate/focus of your company?

Vision: Ruby Slippers Theatre (RST) imagines a world where diversity is celebrated through a deeper understanding of each other.

Mandate: To bring this vision to reality, RST illuminates underrepresented perspectives and inspires independent critical thought by giving voice to diverse, female-identifying artists, and by premiering significant Québec works in English translation on the West Coast. Ruby Slippers has a long reputation of furthering underrepresented voices, and putting on smart social satire that is infectiously entertaining.

How often does the theatre premiere new Canadian plays?

Every year - either commissioned English translations of plays written by crucial new Quebec voices, or new plays that are written in English.

What is ADVANCE THEATRE: New Works by Diverse Women?

It is a five-day, five-play festival of new works written and directed by diverse female-identifying artists. These dramatic readings take place during the Vancouver Fringe Festival. For 2020 this opportunity is open to Indigenous playwrights only.

What do great plays at your theatre have in common?

They are socially relevant, character-driven, and text-based.

They embody acting that is poetic and personal. Plays that are intimate yet expansive, that encourage a kind of humanity that expresses who we are and also that life is bigger - that broaden the definition of what it means to be human. We favour the open text approach as defined by Umberto Eco; that is, plays that engage the audience, and make them part of the conversation, rather than encouraging passive spectators who are being manipulated into feeling specified emotions.

PROCESS:

How does a playwright get your attention with a new play? Do you have a submission policy?

Advance Theatre is the main vehicle where we solicit scripts. We do receive scripts at other times. I do read them. I prefer a synopsis with a 10-page excerpt.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

I don't want to receive a first draft, but an excerpt from a play that's in mid or late development is good. With a play in mid-stage, there is the possibility of helping with the development.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

One hundred.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

The majority.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I read the synopsis and 10 pages of the script. If I'm engaged and the play furthers our mandate, I will request the full script.

How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

Email follow-up is okay but I prefer no phone calls.

Do you prefer an invite to a staged reading or a production rather than reading a new script?

I love staged readings. They are an excellent way to assess a play. I would attend a production in a different city if it was a play I was interested in.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at your theatre? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off?

What works for me is if they've read our mandate, looked at past seasons, and come to a show. I get a little bit crazy if they don't know anything about us, but this doesn't happen often. Phone calls are challenging because people want dramaturgical analysis on the spot and this is very difficult to do with all the submissions I get.

Playwrights often grumble that it's hard enough to get first productions of a new play but even harder to get a second production, do you think this is true? Why?

Yes. A premiere has some cache. But *Ruby Slippers* often does second productions.

How might a playwright go about getting a second production with your company?

Send the glowing reviews for the premiere and pitch it in a timely fashion.

CONTENT:

What play did you read or see last that really excited you?

An utterly unique and beautiful play by Indigenous writer Yvonne Wallace called *ūtszan* about language reclamation. Two plays by Hannah Moscovitch: *Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes* and *What a Young Wife Ought to Know*. Great dialogue; relevant content. *Babysitter* by Catherine Leger. It made me laugh but is also smart social commentary. *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage.

AUDIENCE:

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Mostly women (approximately 75%), mostly white, but we're working on diversifying the audience. Ages twenty-five to seventy, but more over forty. Our core demographic is educated women, forty to seventy-five years of age. The demographic depends somewhat on the venue: Gateway vs Cultch, or the Firehall.

What plays have been popular with them in the past?

Sharp, social satire – biting wit, biting into the hypocrisy of our culture.

Plays that make the audience laugh in recognition, think critically, and hopefully act, all the while empowering marginalized perspectives.

PERSONAL:

What keeps you working in the theatre?

The possibility of transformation – hope through action. The world can change. There is intellectual, spiritual, and imaginative power to get things right. Theatre is the humanizing part of our culture because it is live and has a symbiotic relationship with the audience – so crucial in the age of hyper technology.